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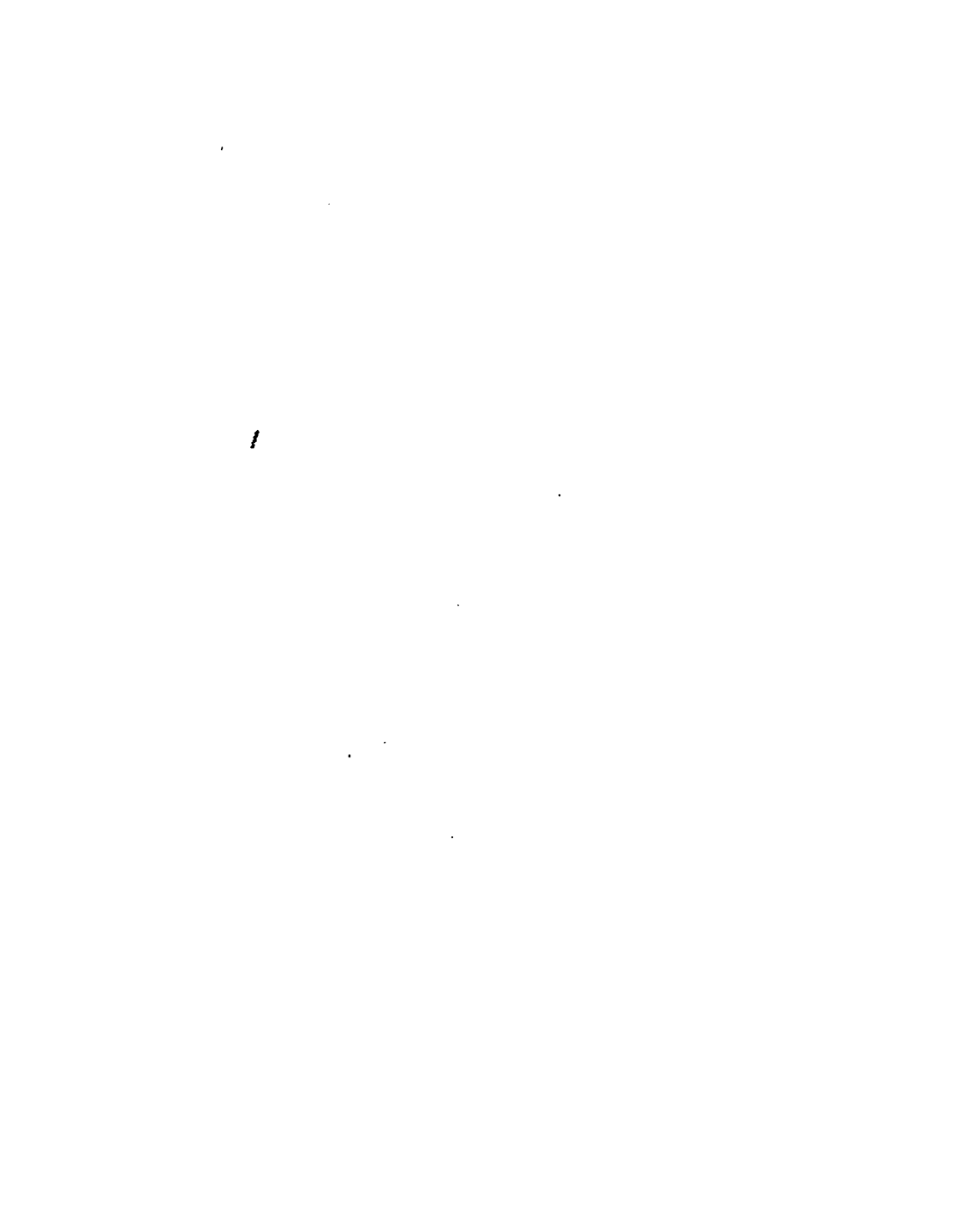






To
George Stuart Christie,
as a souvenir of the
hit "she" made with
the audience & the
author, Edward Pepler

Oct 31-1909





3





FOR THE ROSE YOU GAVE I WILL GIVE AN HUNDRED
ROSES

ΤΟ ΤΗΣ ΣΟΥΡΑΣ ΕΠ

THE
MALLET'S MASTERPIECES

10049
BY
EDWARD PEPLE

ILLUSTRATED BY C. M. BULL

NEW YORK
MOFFAT, YARD AND COMPANY
1908
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
FOR THE ROSE YOU GAVE I WILL GIVE AN HUNDRED ROSES . . . <i>Frontispiece</i>	
FROM WINTER TILL THE SPRINGTIME CAME HE CUT AWAY HER PRISON BARS	48
<i>AS I STRIKE NOW!</i>	60
THE SOMETHING FOR WHICH I SOUGHT AND COULD NOT FIND	68



THE MALLETS MASTERPIECE

was whispered even unto Athens; whose fame, in the gossip of nobles at the baths, was linked with that of Praxiteles. A low-walled garden faced the south, where warm winds lured his flowers forth and fanned their fragrance through the open halls; and from here a visitor might step within, inspect the spacious rooms adorned with chiseled works of art, then pass beyond into the bright brown street which led to the little theatre, and further on to the palace of Memmiades, King of Melos, on the highest hill of all.

Across the sculptor's central hall ran a double row of Corinthian columns supporting the roof with their carven capitals; and here four heavy curtains hung in the form of a square enclosure—a room within

a room and guarded jealously, for in it a secret lay, concealed from every eye save that of Philotias alone. Above was an opening in the roof, admitting light, yet shaded by a parti-colored canopy, beneath which the sculptor was wont to toil till the day grew old and darkness forced the mallet from his hand.

King Memmiades had made the promise of a splendid prize to him who should carve a statue worthy of holding the place of honor in his tiny marble theatre on the hill; and in Melos a score of sculptors vied amongst themselves for the glory of this wreath of fame. Yet, till the King and his judges passed upon the winning work, no alien eye might look upon it; therefore each contestant wrought in secret, striv-

TO THE TALENTED MA

ing to set his cunning handicraft above the arts of other men.

Thus, in the home of Philotias, no slaves passed to and fro to distract the master's thought; the halls were silent save for the echoes from the distant street, and the tinnient clinking of a chisel as it bit its way to fame. Then came a trespasser.

Fair was she, this youthful maiden, with the saucy mien of one who fears not, knowing that the gates of love are ever open to her nod. She was clothed in a soft white robe, its border edged with silver, while a jeweled girdle caught it at the waist. With one small hand she grasped her skirt, displaying tiny sandals which made no sound upon the tiles, and in the other she swung a full-blown rose.

For a moment she paused in doubt, then tripped to the sculptor's curtain listening to the beat of his mallet strokes; then, with merriment suppressed, she tossed her flower within, fled, and hid herself behind a marble lounging-seat.

The sound of the chisel ceased. Philotias stepped forth, a look of wonder in his boyish eyes. His short gray tunic was open at the throat; his arms were bare, his dark locks thrust away from his glistening brow. His right hand held a heavy wooden mallet, and in his left he bore the maiden's rose. He glanced from right to left, till suddenly he spied the fold of a fluttering robe; then he smiled and began to stare at the opening in his roof.

"Zeus!" he cried. "Do flowers

drop from out the skies?" At a peal of silvery laughter he wheeled about, dropping his mallet to the floor and stretching out his hands. "Adonia!"

Again she laughed as she came toward him happily.

"And did you think some spy had crept along the roof to peep upon your secret work?"

"Aye," he replied, in mock solemnity, "a very villain—a spy so dangerous that I would hold her prisoner here, lest another claim her in captivity."

He sought to prove his wish with the shield of one strong brown arm, but she laughed and slipped from the bold embrace.

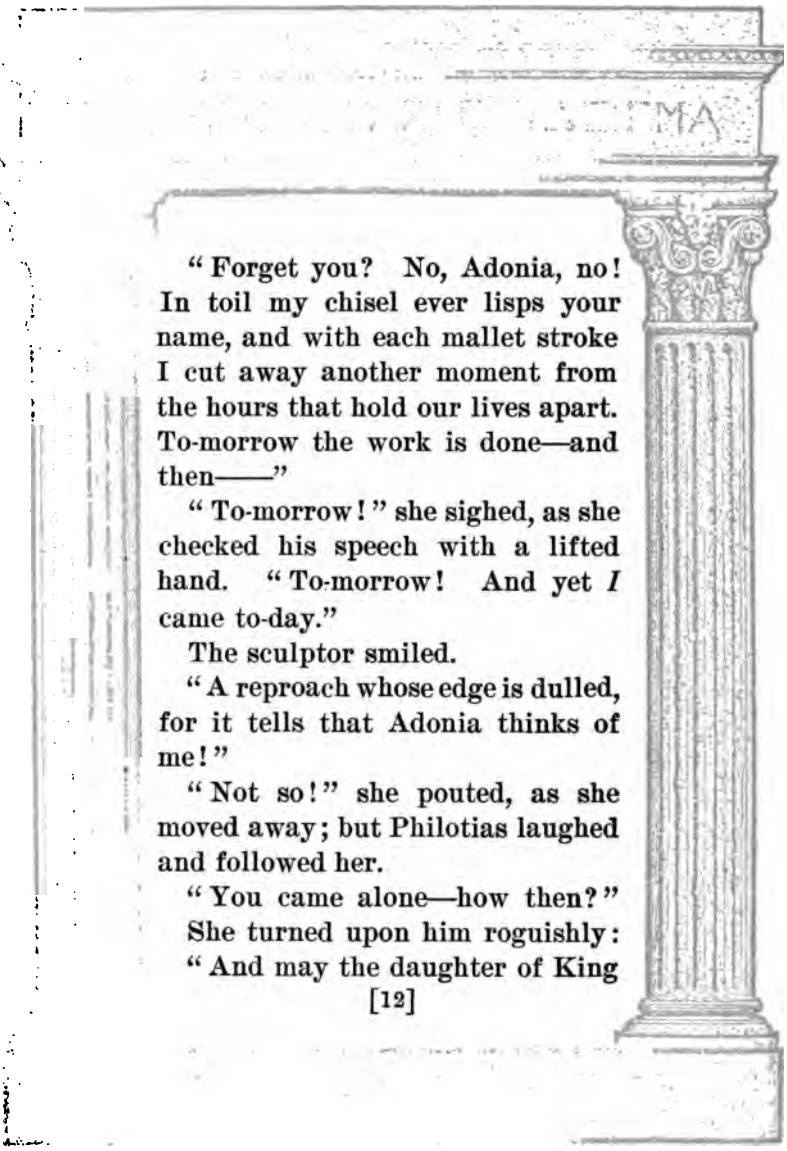
"Yet tell me in truth," Adonia begged, as he once more took her

hands, "what fancy came to you when my flower tumbled at your feet?"

"That from the finger-tips of Hera fell the petals of a rose; and each I kissed, as I kiss each finger-tip."

"Nay, silver-tongue," she chided, while she drew her hands from beneath his lips and spoke in a saddened tone; "my rose was tossed to wake your memory of a maid who waits for three long days, yet Philotias comes not. He sleeps—to dream of a sculptor's prize—and, dreaming, forgets the maid."

Her voice grew faint and sorrowful. She turned her head away, and the sculptor sought to soothe her mood by gentleness and the love he bore.



“Forget you? No, Adonia, no! In toil my chisel ever lisps your name, and with each mallet stroke I cut away another moment from the hours that hold our lives apart. To-morrow the work is done—and then——”

“To-morrow!” she sighed, as she checked his speech with a lifted hand. “To-morrow! And yet I came to-day.”

The sculptor smiled.

“A reproach whose edge is dulled, for it tells that Adonia thinks of me!”

“Not so!” she pouted, as she moved away; but Philotias laughed and followed her.

“You came alone—how then?” She turned upon him roguishly: “And may the daughter of King

Memmiades not journey as she wills to—to greet a friend?”

“Friend!” he cried. “What? *Friend?*”

“Nay, lover then,” she answered, placing her hands upon his shoulders and looking deep into his eyes. “Yet is the name of friend not sweet if one be faithful to the name? I thought to be angry, but you steal away my anger, too.”

“Wherein the thief hath wisdom,” the sculptor laughed. Again she pouted and turned away, and again the sculptor followed her, to ask: “Your slaves and maidens, where are they?”

“Yonder,” she answered, pointing to the sun-lit street, whence floated the tinkling chime of harps and the voice of a laughing flute.

"I bade them tarry in the shade of the temple's wall, for my words to-day are for you alone."

"Ah!" he smiled. "It is so I love you best of all—alone."

"And yet," she hastened to deny, "I would not thus have come to—to swell your vanity, save for causes troublous and grave."

"Oho! And the chief of these——?"

"Is jealousy."

The sculptor's boyish merriment rang out till the birds in his garden fluttered from the shrubs and winged their way to safety beyond the wall.

"Jealousy!" he cried. "In the name of all the gods—of what?"

"Of this," she answered, touching his mallet with her sandal's tip;

“and of *her*—your hidden mystery that holds you worshipper, by night, by day.”

Once more the sculptor smiled, as he stepped between her and the curtains which hid his work.

“How know you that it be a marble woman, rather than a man?”

“How know it!” she scoffed. “My jeweled belt—my very sandals—will I wager on it. Aye, and ’tis an Aphrodite, too!”

“And is Adonia jealous of a stone?” he asked. “True, I have wrought an Aphrodite; yet as a mother, chaste and pure, who in her arms holds forth a babe in offering to Mars—a son!”

“Ah!” she breathed in eagerness, forgetting all else save a

woman's wish to see. "And you will show it me?"

"Nay, it is forbidden."

"To me? Even to me, Philotias?"

He nodded and led her to the marble lounging-seat, standing beside her with her hand still held in his.

"Listen, child; your father, the King, makes offer of a prize, and for this I strive, as Vasta strives—Clytus—and many more, as you know full well."

The maiden looked up in wonder.

"And I but asked to *see*. What harm may come of a single glance from a woman's eyes?"

"What harm?" he laughed.

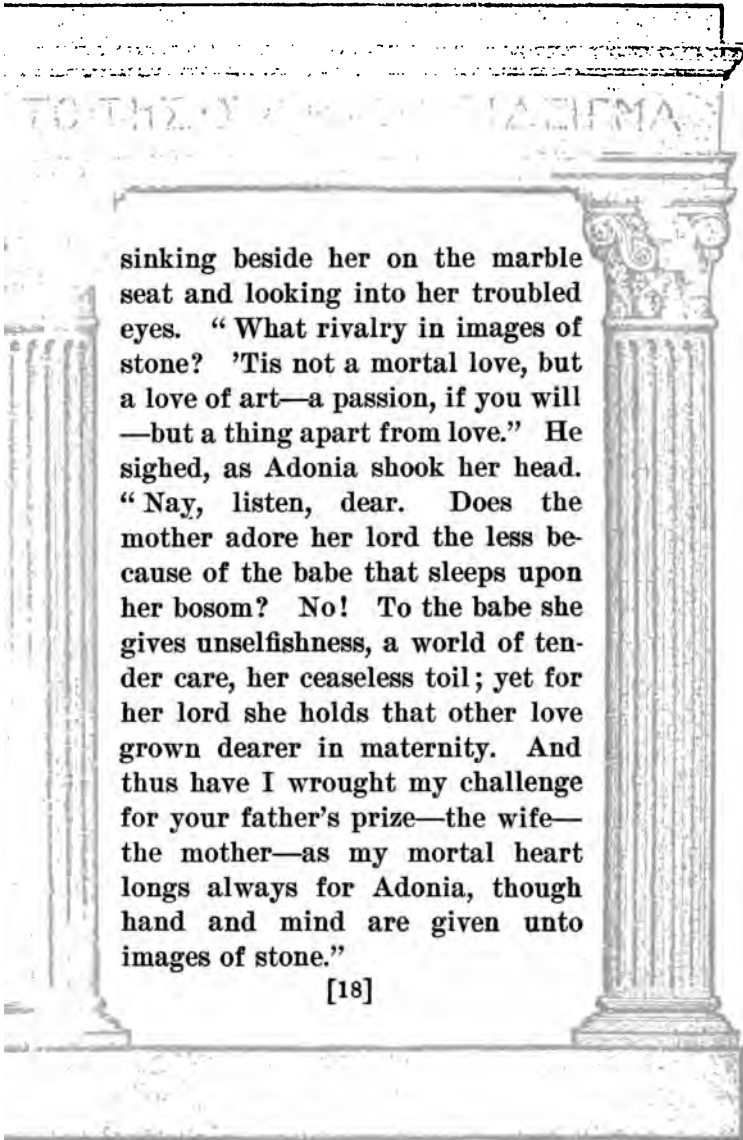
"More mischief than the world and all therein may serve—with Pluto for a cook."

She was silent for a space, then slowly turned her head away; and when he called her name, she would neither speak nor raise her eyes.

"Adonia!" he murmured gently, but no answer came. "Adonia! Come, child, what troubles you?"

"No longer am I a child," she disavowed; "but a woman whom your coldness wounds." She flung out her hand impatiently. "Oh, I care not what your chisel shapes! 'Tis not a maiden's whim unwarranted, but the fear of losing you. This fame for which you strive! This wreath of foolish leaves which crowns your hope! Your work—more dear than one who yearns for love—and yearns in vain."

"And will you never understand?" Philotias questioned sadly,

A decorative rectangular frame surrounds the text. It features two classical columns on the left and right sides, with ornate capitals. The top of the frame has a horizontal band with some faint, illegible text. The entire frame is set against a plain background.

sinking beside her on the marble seat and looking into her troubled eyes. "What rivalry in images of stone? 'Tis not a mortal love, but a love of art—a passion, if you will—but a thing apart from love." He sighed, as Adonia shook her head. "Nay, listen, dear. Does the mother adore her lord the less because of the babe that sleeps upon her bosom? No! To the babe she gives unselfishness, a world of tender care, her ceaseless toil; yet for her lord she holds that other love grown dearer in maternity. And thus have I wrought my challenge for your father's prize—the wife—the mother—as my mortal heart longs always for Adonia, though hand and mind are given unto images of stone."

The maiden ceased to frown, and raised her eyes, now glistening with tears.

“Forgive,” she pleaded. “I understand at last. My lips prove traitors to every kindly thought, for my heart is troubled, shrinking because of fear.”

“Fear?” he asked, in half amused astonishment. “Of what?”

“Of Vasta!” she answered bitterly, rising to her feet, her white hands clenched, her fair cheek reddening with a flush of angry shame.

The sculptor took a backward step.

“What! My good friend Vasta? Surely not of him!”

“No friend is he of yours,” the maid declared; and when Philotias smiled indulgently, she added with

a frown: "Ah, laugh if you will, but I have marked his scowl at mention of your name. His eyes grow dark, and in them creeps a light of evil, and then——"

She paused, for her lover checked her with a merry laugh.

"Moonshine, Adonia! Moonshine—nothing more! In youth he was my playmate and as brother of my blood."

"Aye," agreed the maid, "but rivals in all your sports, as you are rivals now in the sculptor's art."

"True," returned Philotias, "yet Vasta was ever honest in his strength. What more may a comrade ask—an open heart—an open hand? And this has he proven, aye, and to my shame."

"How? Tell me!" Adonia

THE SCULPTOR AND THE MAIDEN

"Wait! To me came a passionate desire for victory—and fury because I might not gain the lead. I heard the cries of those who wagered on my heels—a din of voices—jumbled—shrill! It fired my blood! It maddened me! I prayed to the gods, in rage, that Vasta might trip and fall! From him I would win, though I trod upon his neck; and so we ended—yet none might say whose foot first crossed the line."

Again the sculptor paused, and sighed.

"And then——?" the maiden asked in eagerness. "What then?"

"The judge gave praise to each, and would divide the purse between us equally; but Vasta stepped before him, breathing hard and fast.

‘O noble judge,’ he urged, ‘I pray you give it to Philotias, for on yesterday I won a prize, where he, my rival, lost.’ ”

“The fox!” breathed Adonia in the hollow of her hand, while Philotias, unconscious of her mood, went on:

“Think! What generosity! Was Vasta’s hand not open? Was his heart not warm? To me he offered all, and I, abashed, could answer nothing, for my soul was shamed.”

“Ah!” flashed the maid, with a curling lip. “And what said this noble judge?”

Philotias smiled and spread his hands.

“‘Vasta,’ said the judge—and I can see him now as he looked in pride upon the boy—‘Vasta, in

speed your rival equals you, but in unselfish grace you have outstripped him far. The purse is yours.' ”

Adonia snapped her fingers, rising from her seat in scorn that was undisguised.

“ And then, no doubt ” she jeered, “ dear Vasta proffered you a half, and you refused. ” As the sculptor nodded, she laughed derisively. “ And so he blinded you—both you and this foolish judge—as he seeks to blind you now by treachery and craft. ”

“ Adonia ! ”

“ What ! ” she shrilled, “ and know you not that he would rob you of another of your heart's desires ? ” As the sculptor stared in speechless wonderment, she struck her fist

against her bosom, crying out aloud: "Of me! Of me! Adonia who loves you, and who hates the very sound of Vasta's evil name!"

"Come, come, enough!" her lover chided. "Some ugly fancy makes your tongue unjust—unkind!"

"I tell you, it is true!" the maid flung back in wrath. "Forever he haunts my father's heels, deceiving him with flatteries."

"But why?"

"Why? And are you still so blind? He steals my father's confidence—learns what sculptured work will please him best—and gains advantage over you."

"And this is all?" the smiling sculptor asked.

"No," she answered bitterly, "and I wish it were. So sure is he

of triumph now that he seeks to wring a promise that should he win the prize, then shall he win me also—as a wife.”

Once more she sank upon the marble seat, sobbing, and hid her face upon her outflung arms. For a moment Philotias stood in troubled thought—troubled because of Vasta who was his friend, and because of Adonia’s fear; then he came to her side and asked:

“And in truth you have heard him speak, and heard the King make answer to his words?”

“N-no,” she began, in doubt, then added quickly when he smiled: “But I have marked their whisperings—their glances to where I sat apart. *I feel! I know!*”

“Ah, you see?” he laughed.

“More moonshine, little one, for none shall part us while I live. And even were it true, this fancied fear, what matters it? Will I not win, and, winning, gain a prize more splendid still?—for Adonia will then be mine!”

The maiden sobbed and raised her arms to him.

“Win! Win, Philotias!” she cried, “lest, losing you, my heart shall love no more.”

“Aye,” he answered, and took her in a close embrace, “aye, for you, though a thousand enemies beset our path.” He stroked her hair and soothed her with a score of arts which lovers know, till at length her grief was spent. “Poor Vasta!” he whispered, presently. “He loves you, too. Yet is it strange? The

whole glad world should love Adonia. Come, we'll think of it no more. In my garden, for the rose you gave, I will give an hundred roses. Come."

He took her hand and led her from the hall, along the graveled paths whose borders, like a painter's palette, were splashed with the colors of a master's brush. And here, as she filled her hands with flowers, all fear of Vasta fluttered from Adonia's heart, even as the song-birds winged their flight across the garden wall.

II

The slave who kept the outer gate sat nodding in the noon-day heat, his thick lips parted, his black chin

resting on his breast; and Vasta smiled as he passed this sorry sentinel, thinking to tell the master of a servant's negligence.

He had come from his perfumed bath, and, in passing, thought to speak with his friend Philotias, or remain, perchance, for the mid-day meal.

He was clad in a flowing toga, bordered as befit his rank, while a rich blue cloak was flung across his shoulder, caught with a jeweled clasp. As he strode unchallenged through the court, he marveled to find it now untenanted, no slaves on watch, no sound of the chisel coming from beyond the curtain's folds.

"Philotias!" he called. "Are you here, old friend?"

No answer came, and Vasta's

keen eyes, moving restlessly, fell upon Adonia and his friend at the garden's furthest end. He leaned against a column, watching, a flush of jealous anger mounting to his cheek, while he muttered slowly, bitterly:

"In the garden—with her—alone! He crowns her with a flowered wreath, and she laughs into his eyes! And I must watch—and suffer as I watch!"

He scowled in sullen fury, murmuring again:

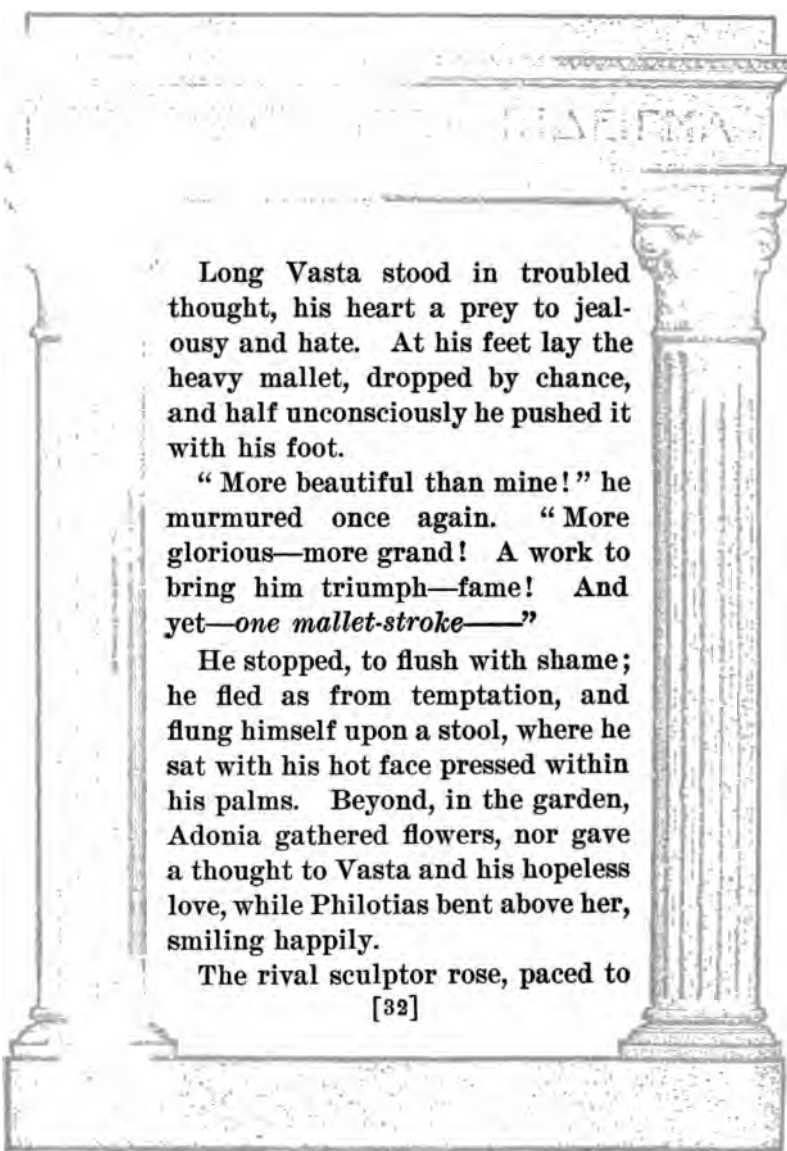
"She comes, no doubt, to view his masterpiece—his work which will rival mine!"

Vasta started guiltily at a thought which came to him; yet the sight of the lovers wandering hand in hand banished his scruples,

trampled on his pride; then his slim, white fingers crept toward his rival's curtain, drawing it aside. He turned and looked—looked long and silently upon a wonder-work—a calm, proud mother and her infant son. He moved not, save that his hand was trembling, while his cheek grew pale—as pale as the chiseled figures mocking him. His fingers loosed their hold. The curtain fell. He sighed and turned away.

“More beautiful than mine!” he breathed, sadly, as one to whom defeat is but a name for weak despair. Then he clenched his fists in rage.

“Philotias will wrest the prize from me! By Pluto, he will win, and winning, claim Adonia for his own!”



Long Vasta stood in troubled thought, his heart a prey to jealousy and hate. At his feet lay the heavy mallet, dropped by chance, and half unconsciously he pushed it with his foot.

“More beautiful than mine!” he murmured once again. “More glorious—more grand! A work to bring him triumph—fame! And yet—*one mallet-stroke*——”

He stopped, to flush with shame; he fled as from temptation, and flung himself upon a stool, where he sat with his hot face pressed within his palms. Beyond, in the garden, Adonia gathered flowers, nor gave a thought to Vasta and his hopeless love, while Philotias bent above her, smiling happily.

The rival sculptor rose, paced to

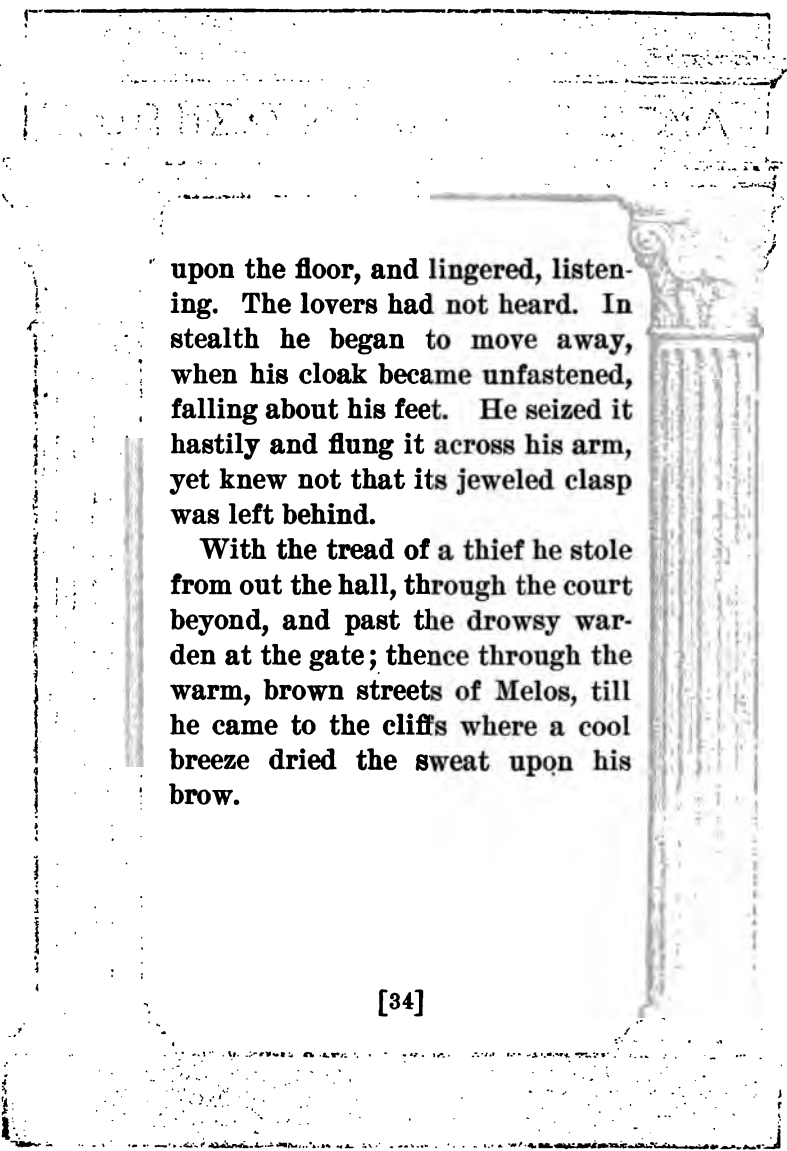
and fro, battling with an evil thought which ate into his brain. *One mallet-stroke!* A faint breeze stirred the curtains softly, and a weapon lay beneath his hand.

Once more he looked to where the lovers idled in the sun, and his heart was gnawed by bitterness—stirred to the very depths of passion—hot with the hate of an enemy who was once a friend.

“Adonia!” he whispered hoarsely. “For him her smiles—her kisses—*and for me—*”

With an oath he snatched the mallet up and disappeared behind the curtain’s folds, whence came the sound of furious blows and the crash of marble falling on the tiles.

Then Vasta, pale and trembling, crept forth, replaced the implement



upon the floor, and lingered, listening. The lovers had not heard. In stealth he began to move away, when his cloak became unfastened, falling about his feet. He seized it hastily and flung it across his arm, yet knew not that its jeweled clasp was left behind.

With the tread of a thief he stole from out the hall, through the court beyond, and past the drowsy warden at the gate; thence through the warm, brown streets of Melos, till he came to the cliffs where a cool breeze dried the sweat upon his brow.

III

Once more the hall resounded with the music of a maiden's merriment, for Adonia danced from out the garden, a wreath of green upon her hair, her plump hands filled with flowers.

"And now," she laughed, "the little trespasser must run away, for well I know the sculptor's hands would be as busy as my own."

Philotias placed himself before her, a glint of mischief in his merry eye.

"Then, since your hands are filled, which will you lose, your roses or a kiss?"

"Impertinence!" She took a backward step and let her flowers

fall. "Nay, my roses then, for kisses come high to-day."

"What price?" he laughed. "Name it and I will pay a miser's store!"

Adonia cast down her eyes.

"It must be a heavy one," she murmured thoughtfully, then raised her head as a sparrow that drinks from a fountain's rim: "And in truth you will not cheat me, but will give the value asked?"

"Aye."

"Done!" she cried. "One peep at yonder mystery."

"Trickster!"

He laughed and tapped her cheek with a budding rose, promising to pay all else but this, his secret, guarded even from the eyes of love;

yet Adonia pouted, then strove to tempt him by a subtler art.

“There are other strugglers for the prize who would show me their work for *half* the price.”

“No doubt!”

“There is Clytus, who chisels a bold Diana with her dog in leash. Perchance I err, yet methinks he would *give* me his statue for a kiss.”

“Why not?” the sculptor teased. “His work was ever bad.”

Again Adonia pouted, then smiled and tried once more, craftily, as woman will, seeking the weakest joints in the armor of those whom her heart would shield:

“Vasta fashions a mighty god of war—victorious from battle—his sword aloft!” She glanced toward Philotias, and sighed: “I fear ’twill

touch the warrior spirit of my father—overmuch.”

“Ah!” the sculptor mused, and set to pacing to and fro. “A war god! Dangerous! Dangerous! True, mine is well-nigh perfect—pure in line and pose; and yet”—he paused to sink his voice into a troubled whisper—“and yet there is a something wanting—a something hidden from my eye—a *thought* — elusive — wondrous! — and beyond my grasp.”

“Then show it me,” said the maiden, roguishly, “and mayhap I will tell you what this something is.”

Her lover laughed, and she sought to break the last frail barrier down.

“Come, dear one, I will look but once—one little, little peep.” She

pleaded with her arms about his neck, while again and again her warm lips pressed his own. "See, I pay! I pay! I pay!"

He held her close, and looked into her upturned face.

"And who," he cried, "could refuse such lips—such eyes? By Eros, not Philotias!"

He led her toward the swaying draperies, first charging her to guard his secret well; then he stood apart to watch lest a passing servant see, and wag his tongue. The maiden leaned against a fluted pillar and drew one curtain's fold aside. She looked—in silence—for horror seized upon her and held her motionless; the while Philotias, dreaming of his triumph, smiled happily, and asked:

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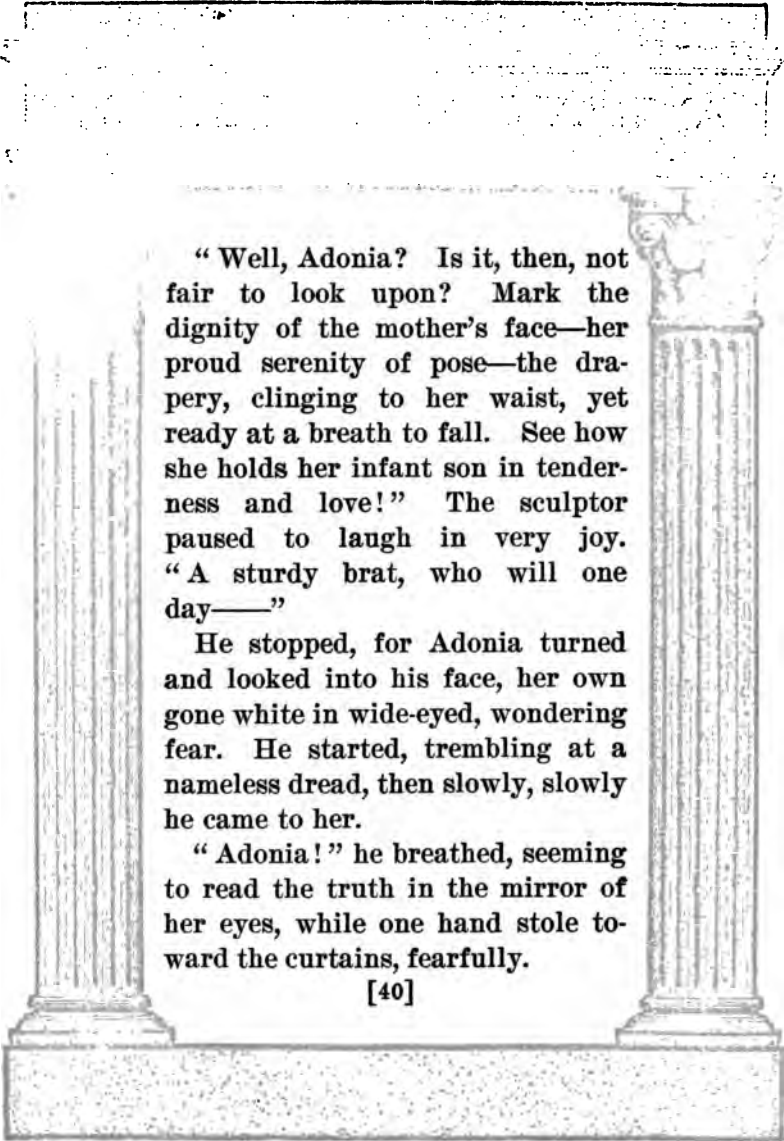
"Then show
maiden, roguish
will tell you wha
is."

Her lover laughed,
to break the last frail

"Come, dear one, I
once—one little, li
[38]

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“Well, Adonia? Is it, then, not fair to look upon? Mark the dignity of the mother’s face—her proud serenity of pose—the drapery, clinging to her waist, yet ready at a breath to fall. See how she holds her infant son in tenderness and love!” The sculptor paused to laugh in very joy. “A sturdy brat, who will one day——”

He stopped, for Adonia turned and looked into his face, her own gone white in wide-eyed, wondering fear. He started, trembling at a nameless dread, then slowly, slowly he came to her.

“Adonia!” he breathed, seeming to read the truth in the mirror of her eyes, while one hand stole toward the curtains, fearfully.

The maid cried out and clung to him, but she might not stay him now, for he broke from her clasp and thrust the draperies aside. Then he stood, in reeling unbelief, before the wreck of all his hope; and, as Vasta had gazed, so gazed Philotias, silent, stricken by despair.

At his feet lay the sculptured babe, the mother's hands still holding it, as if in maternal hunger for her own. Her arms—her wondrous arms—were gone, shattered, flung in fragments to the floor; while the weight of her babe, in falling, had marred one perfect foot.

This the sculptor saw—the ruin—not the figure still erect upon its pedestal; and his brain grew dizzy, while the room spun round and

round. At last his hold upon the curtain loosed. He turned and crossed the hall, slowly, blindly, as one who gropes his way; then he sank upon a stool, staring before him into nothingness.

For a moment Adonia watched him, rent with pity, then fell beside him on her knees.

"Philotias!" she sobbed. "My poor Philotias!"

"A dream! . . . An ugly dream!" he muttered, numbly, as one half roused from sleep; then he wheeled upon her, crying out in pain: "*In the name of Pluto strike me that I wake!*"

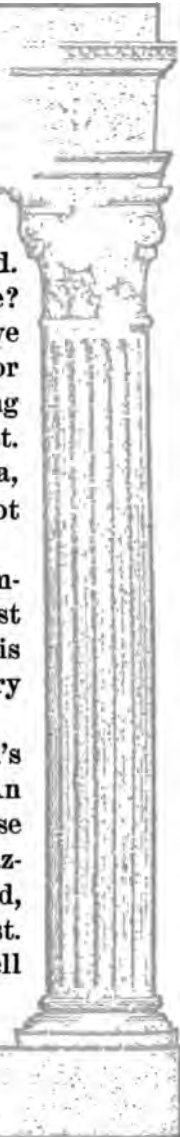
Adonia flung her arms about him, striving to soothe him as she might have soothed a child; yet he paid no heed, nor seemed to feel the pres-

sure of her arms, heedless even of the words she spoke.

"Ah, dear love," she sobbed, "and do you then not understand?—that while we gathered roses from the garden beds, some beast in the shape of man—some——"

"Aye, but who?" he cried, rising in fury, thrusting her aside. "What enemy have I to do a thing so vile? To kill my heart and let my body live! To strike a defenseless stone! To dash the babe from its mother's clasp! They were mine, these two, the children of my brain—my soul! 'Tis murder! Murder!"

He staggered and moved away, casting himself upon the marble seat, while Adonia followed, sinking beside him, kneeling at his feet.



“Ah, listen, dear,” she pleaded. “Have you not Adonia’s love? Where I loved before, I will give again a thousand-fold in pity for the pain you bear. ’Tis not a thing to mourn as one forever lost. Think! Had *I* been slain—Adonia, whom you love—would that not bring a sharper pang?”

He made no answer, and a slumbering fear awoke within her breast—a fear for this art to which his life was given, his thoughts, his very soul, as he himself had said.

“What!” she cried, “is an idol’s image dearer than my own? An effigy of frozen flesh?” She rose and took a backward step, still gazing on him, while her bosom heaved, while her breath came hot and fast.

“You do not heed——! Ah, tell

me, dear one, why you do not heed?"

"The coward!" he breathed, in smothered wrath. "The coward!"

His ears were deaf to her heart's appeal. He had not heard; nor did he raise his eyes to one who pleaded for her all. A low sob broke in Adonia's throat, as she stumbled away and cast herself upon a distant seat, trembling, weeping bitterly. At the sound her lover started, coming to her side and looking on the girl in sad surprise.

"Come, little one," he murmured gently; "tears are not for such as you. Song—sunlight—laughter—love!"

"You love me not!"

"Adonia!" he chided, in

wounded grief; but she answered harshly, stung at last to woman's unreasoning rage, swept by the flame of passion which he himself had lit:

"I tell you, you love me not! Your heart—as cold as the marble block you carved—is given unto images of stone! To *her*—that dull and senseless thing—whose bosom never throbbed to the pulse of love!—whose eyes stare out at nothingness through all eternity!"

Philotias looked down in sorrow on the angry maid, and spoke: "Cease, child, cease! You know not what you say."

He was silent for a space, and when he spoke again his voice was low and dreamy, as though his words were not for her, his human

ΤΟ ΤΗΣ ΣΟΥΡΑΣ ΕΠΙΔΕΙΓ

worshipper, of flesh and blood, but for an idol, stripped of glory, wrapt in the stateliness of death :

“ The block of marble held a living thought—the mother with her babe—a prisoner within an uncut wall. She was *not* a senseless stone! She lived—she breathed—she suffered! Cramped in agony, she strove to burst the shell which held her fast, and to me she was calling—always calling—for release! From winter till the spring-time came I cut away her prison bars, slowly, deftly, lest my chisel wound her flesh ; and she seemed to speak her gratitude with sightless eyes, and urged me on. At night when I tossed upon my couch, I could hear her whispering in the darkness, sobbing, pleading for her

liberty! And then I would light my lamp, creep to her side, to work—and work—and work—till my hands were numb and my brain grew dizzy with the pain of weariness. If I slept, she came to haunt my dreams, pressing with her marble hands upon my breast and crying out in misery, ‘You—you only—can loose me from my cell! Awake! Awake!’”

He paused, and bowed his head before the desecrated pedestal; and Adonia murmured to herself, as sadly and as dreamily as he:

“And could he give me such a love as this, my heart would then be satisfied.”

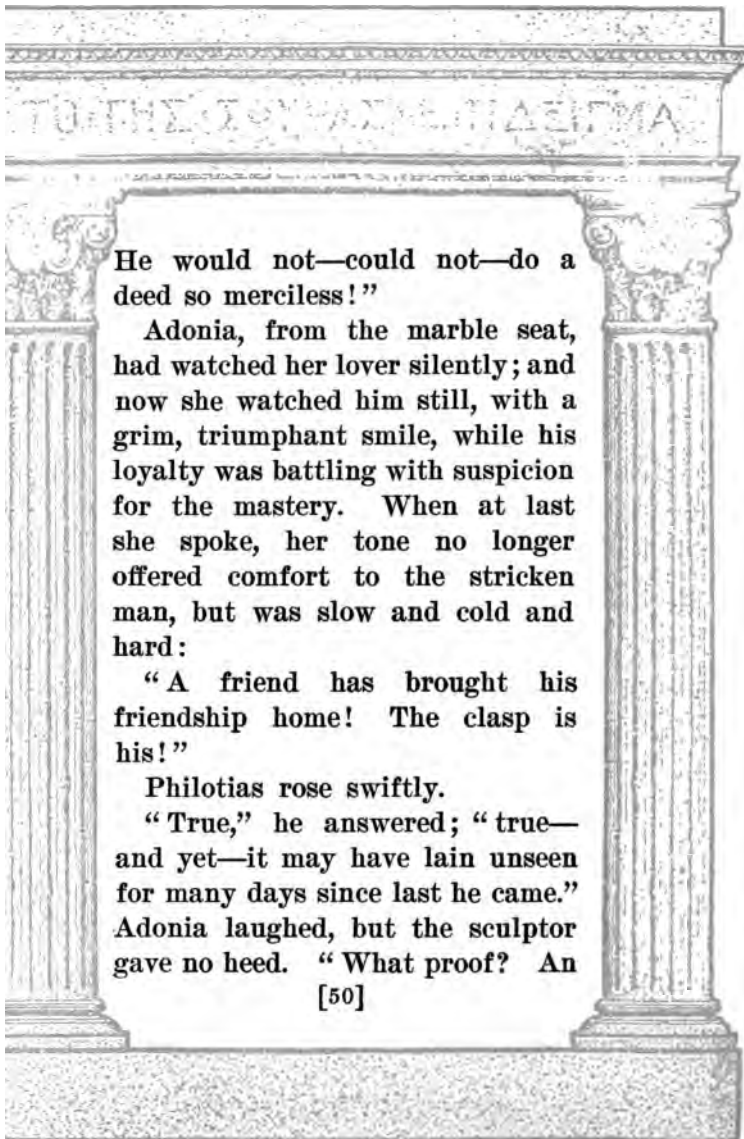
As Philotias stood, his sorrowing gaze cast down, of a sudden his eye was caught by a tiny point of light,



FROM WINTER TILL THE SPRINGTIME CAME HE CUT
AWAY HER PRISON BARS

reflected from where a sunbeam fell. Half unconsciously he strode toward it, then paused while another fear came creeping to his brain. A jeweled clasp it was, which he had given Vasta on a feast-day, not a year gone by. How came it there? For many days he had not seen his friend, yet, perchance, while in the garden with Adonia, Vasta had come—and then—what then? He stooped for the clasp, which seemed to burn his fingers as with fire; then, sinking upon a stool, he idly turned the bauble over and over in his palm:

“Vasta!” he breathed in anguish; then, relenting, cried out against himself: “No! No! A shame upon me for the thought!



He would not—could not—do a deed so merciless!”

Adonia, from the marble seat, had watched her lover silently; and now she watched him still, with a grim, triumphant smile, while his loyalty was battling with suspicion for the mastery. When at last she spoke, her tone no longer offered comfort to the stricken man, but was slow and cold and hard:

“A friend has brought his friendship home! The clasp is his!”

Philotias rose swiftly.

“True,” he answered; “true—and yet—it may have lain unseen for many days since last he came.” Adonia laughed, but the sculptor gave no heed. “What proof? An

enemy may have plucked it from his cloak, to turn suspicion from himself and on Vasta fix the blame."

Again Adonia laughed—laughed shrilly and in scorn.

"And are you then a suckling babe?" she demanded fiercely. "'Tis he who strives to sweep you from his path—to crush your hope—to steal from you my father's prize—to win by cunning where he may not win by art—aye, even as he seeks my love with evil passion in his soul!"

"Cease! Cease, in pity's name!" the sculptor cried; but the wrath-stirred maid swept on:

"'Twas he who marred your work! 'Twas he who struck, and struck in stealthy treachery! Yet,

even while he fled, the gods of justice tore this bauble from his cloak and flung it there! 'Twas he, I say! Your boasted friend! Your Vasta!"

She paused for breath, then clutched her lover's arm, pointing between the columns to the distant street, where the man himself was seen, with his cloak upon his arm.

"See!" she cried. "He passes your servant at the outer gate—your servant, who sleeps as he slept before! 'Tis he! 'Tis Vasta! He comes to find his fallen clasp!—to hide it—and be gone! Ah, now you have the traitor in the hollow of your hand!"

"What mean you?"

"Put back his clasp and watch

TO THE SYMPHONY OF THE
from a hidden place. If again he comes by stealth, then, verily, it proves his guilt."

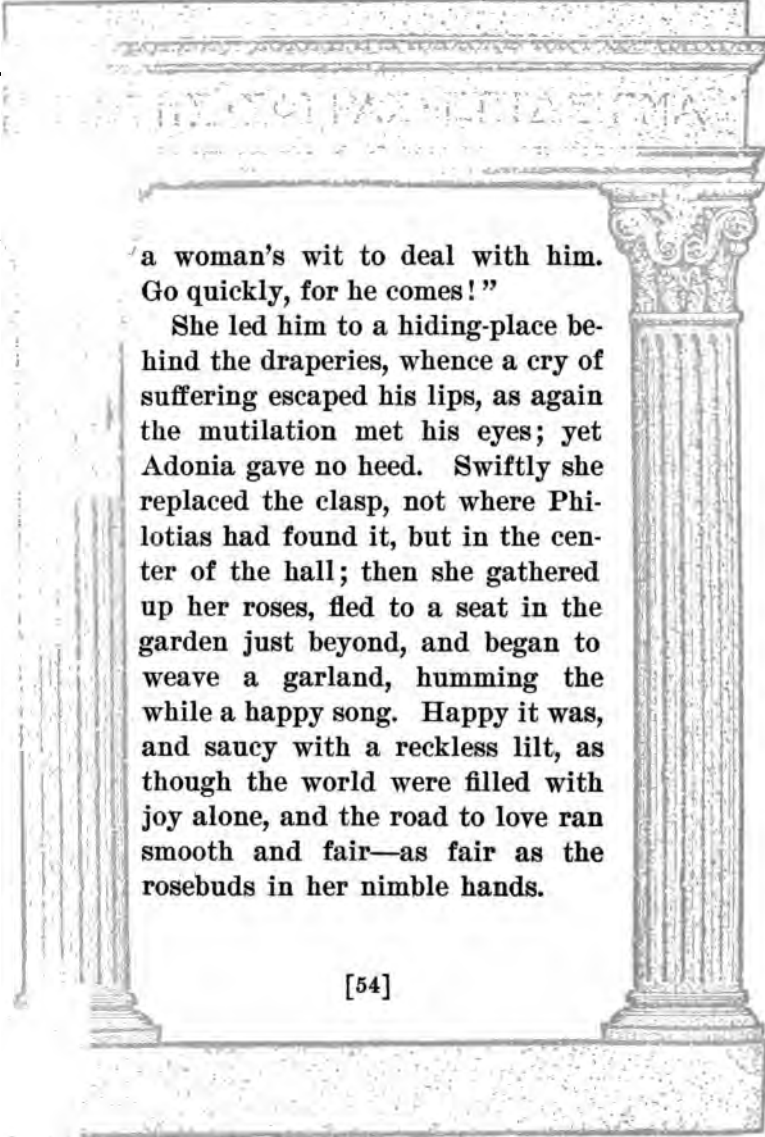
"And if not?" the sculptor asked, still clinging to a straw of hope. "If not?"

Adonia smiled in scorn.

"If not, I crave the villain's pardon—on my knees!"

Vasta was drawing nearer now, and soon would reach the hall; yet Philotias stood, uncertain, his loyal spirit warring with the thought of meeting craft with craft. To Adonia no such scruples came, for her one aim now was to snatch the mask from a man's deceit and show him in the nakedness of guilt.

"Go—go!" she urged. "Go you behind your curtains, and leave



a woman's wit to deal with him.
Go quickly, for he comes!"

She led him to a hiding-place behind the draperies, whence a cry of suffering escaped his lips, as again the mutilation met his eyes; yet Adonia gave no heed. Swiftly she replaced the clasp, not where Philotias had found it, but in the center of the hall; then she gathered up her roses, fled to a seat in the garden just beyond, and began to weave a garland, humming the while a happy song. Happy it was, and saucy with a reckless lilt, as though the world were filled with joy alone, and the road to love ran smooth and fair—as fair as the rosebuds in her nimble hands.

IV

Vasta came slinking through the courtway with a noiseless tread, with restless, searching eyes. Marking Adonia, whose back was turned to him, he wondered that Philotias was not beside her, while he crept from point to point, watchful, listening, poised for instant flight.

Adonia still sang on as she twined her flowers, and eagerly the seeker scanned the floor for his missing clasp, spied it at last, and advanced with cautious footfalls on the tiles. Trembling, he paused, then took another step, another, stooped and reached forth his hand; then gasped with pain to feel an iron grip upon his neck.

Upright he sprang, wheeling, to

face Philotias, while Adonia cast the roses from her lap, and laughed. For a moment no one spoke, till the sculptor broke the silence, demanding sternly:

"Your clasp! How came it here?"

Vasta faltered, beating his brain for some fair excuse.

"My clasp? Four days ago I lost it, and remembering that I was with you then——"

"Stop!" came the sharp command. "If this be true, then why does a friend come creeping through my house as a thief prowls silently by night?"

Vasta wet his thin, dry lips, while a chilly moisture oozed out upon his brow. Once, twice, he strove to speak, then faltered, weakly:

"I—I feared to disturb you at your work. Methought I heard the chisel's sound, and——"

"Liar!"

Once more came silence. Vainly Vasta tried to look into the sculptor's eyes, and his own, abashed, sank slowly down.

"What need of a chisel now?" Philotias asked. "What need, when my work is wrecked?"

"Wrecked——?"

"Aye, and with that—my mallet—in a coward's hand!"

He pointed to the implement upon the floor, while Vasta retreated slowly from his wrathful friend.

"But it was not I," he protested wildly. "As Zeus hears my oath, it was not I!"

"And who accused?" Adonia asked, in sharp, triumphant scorn.

"'Twas he," whined Vasta. "He—Philotias! With his lips he calls me coward—liar! With eyes of anger he accuses me!" Adonia answered nothing, and the man, emboldened, assumed a mien of wounded innocence. "Philotias does me wrong," he declared in his smoothest tone; "and yet I forgive him because of the grief he bears."

The maiden tossed her head impatiently and in contempt.

"Vasta forgives!" she mocked. "May heaven gaze in wonder on this most virtuous of men!"

Philotias eyed his boyhood's friend in pity, harder far to bear than the lash of Adonia's tongue,

till Vasta shrank before him, pleading brokenly:

“Philotias! I have done no hurt to you. In truth I am innocent. Why do you look upon me so?”

“Because I know!” the sculptor answered harshly. “Because I read in a craven’s face his terror of one who trusted him. Confess!”

“No! No! I swear——!”

“*Confess!*”

His grip was on Vasta’s throat. He forced him to his knees, and backward across the wooden stool, while Adonia, watching, panted in her joy.

“*Confess!*”

“Loose me!” the traitor gasped.

“In pity loose me! It was I!”

With a snarl the sculptor thrust

the fellow from him, standing above him, quivering in his rage.

"Forgive, Philotias!" begged Vasta, crawling to his knees. "I knew not what I did. No thought of wrong had I in coming; but when I looked upon your work and knew that you would win——"

"Ah, then you struck!" the sculptor cried, as he stooped for the mallet and gripped it in his hard, brown fist.

"No, no, not then!" the man protested. "I swear not then! But I saw you in the garden—with her—Adonia—whom I love. To you she raised her arms—her eyes; and you crowned her with a wreath. Ah, pity, for I was mad with pain—the jealous fires of hell that drove me! Your mallet was there! It



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AS I STRIKE NOW

tempted me! Broke down my courage—honor if you will—and in blind despair I struck!”

“As I strike now!”

Again Philotias seized the wretch and swung the mallet above his head, holding it poised an instant, while Adonia cried out and hid her face in fear.

“Mercy!” screamed Vasta.
“Mercy—in your mother’s name!”

Then the mallet fell; but not on him who merited the blow. Slowly it sank to the sculptor’s side, till at last he dropped it to the floor.

“Mercy for you? ’Twere well I rid the world of such a man; and yet——” He paused to whisper, slowly, sadly: “And yet I cannot kill a memory. The boy who rode upon my father’s knee—the youth

TO THE ROMAN COLLECTION

who shared my mother's love and mine. Go, Vasta, go; not only from my house, but far from Melos, where my eyes may nevermore be wounded by the sight of you! You, who were my trusted friend! You, who have sunk to this! O Zeus!" he cried, while tears of sorrow rolled unheeded down his cheek. "O Zeus, the pity of it!"

He turned on his heel and moved to where Adonia had risen from her seat; he took her hand in his, stroking it tenderly, then raised it to his lips. Vasta rose, pale and trembling, from his knees, to linger an instant ere he left the hall.

"Forgive, Philotias! Your mercy shames me, even more than the fear of death. Forgive me—and forget!"

Philotias turned, in his eyes a look of grief unutterable.

“Forgive you? No! Forget? I could not if I would.” He pointed to the swaying curtains which hid the ruin of his hope. “Was it not enough to mutilate my idol there, but that you should seek to rob me of this idol, too?” He placed a protecting arm about Adonia, smoothing the locks upon her temples with a gentle hand; then he wheeled on Vasta in a tempest-gust of rage: “What! Would you drag her to your arms—to stifle purity, and call it love? A shrinking maid who hates you—loathes you! Go! Out of my sight, lest fury tempt me and I spare no more!”

Vasta, retreating, looked in terror on his foe; yet ere he could es-

cape, Philotias, springing forward, gripped his arm.

"No, wait! Once more shall you look upon your evil work—to brand it on your memory—to keep it while you live!"

With a sweep of his arm he tore the curtains down, revealing the broken statue and the fragments at her feet. Then he spoke in passion, his deep tones rolling through the hall till they woke the drowsy sentinel at the outer gate:

"See, Vasta, what a madness you have wrought! The babe that was beaten from its mother's clasp! The mother—rapt in the glory of a new-born son! Look! Look into her eyes that may not weep her grief as I weep mine! And you have done this thing—you—the

outcast whom the gods of honor spit upon! Out on you, Vasta, of a devil born!" He turned to the sculptured wreck, in anguish and in tears: "Behold your work—a splendor now made hideous—a flower stripped of leaves—a withered stalk—a shat——"

He stopped—stopped in the very middle of his word, while through him shot a thrill of wondering awe. Silent he stood, his wide eyes fixed upon the marble, while one by one the moments slid away. Was this the same? This carven miracle—fairer than mortal sculptor dared to dream? What recked it that her babe was gone, her white arms dashed to earth? She stood upon her pedestal—a broken stone—dis-membered—yet far more perfect

TO THE ... ED LANE ...

still in her matchless, grand simplicity.

As the sculptor saw, so Vasta also saw and understood, knowing that his deed had come to naught, knowing that his evil had recoiled upon himself alone; while Philotias, still motionless, spoke at last, in a hushed, hoarse whisper touched with reverence:

"More beautiful than before! More beautiful! The something for which I sought and could not find!"

Of a sudden he turned upon his rival, his voice a trumpet-note of triumph and of joy:

"Go forth and match your chiseled god of war against this broken stone! This splintered wreck! This mallet's masterpiece!

The prize? 'Twill laugh at prizes, winning where before it might have lost! And you have done this thing in treachery and evil love! You, Vasta! You! Go tell it if you dare! Go shout it from the house-top for the world to hear! Before 'twas the work of man, the toil of months, the thought of years; but now 'tis a thing divine—to stand when the name of Vasta is but a whisper down the wind—to live . . . till the very stars shall die!”

He ceased, and Adonia went to him, to his open arms, where she rested, sobbing out her happiness. Then Vasta crept in shame away, to hide dishonor with a silent tongue.

V

The sculptor's prophecy proved true. When King Memmiades and his judges passed upon the statues set before them, with one accord they chose the Mallet's Master-piece, and placed it in the entrance of their marble theater on the hill; and for a space Philotias wore his wreath of fame, with a still more precious wreath of Adonia's love.

In after days, when the glory of Melos was but a thing of dreams, the sons of another race came forth to dig for treasures of the past. They found a broken statue buried there, and, marveling, they bore it unto distant lands.

And now from out the wondering world came all who wrought in



THE SOMETHING FOR WHICH I SOUGHT AND COULD NOT
FIND

marble and in stone, each striving by his art to replace the figure's missing arms; but lo, their cunning failed, for the hand of no man might undo the miracle of Vasta's mallet-stroke. So, marveling still, they ceased to mend a masterpiece. Then, borrowing from the city's name, they called it the Venus de Milo, and set it in the highest temple of their arts.

As once it stood in the sculptor's hall, so now it stands to-day, as woman's rival—a dull and senseless thing whose bosom never throbbed to the pulse of love—whose eyes stare out at nothingness through all eternity.

A broken stone! Yet a perfect work, in a place of honor—to live till the very stars shall die.

B.F.





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